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Domestic Violence Against Women: A Literature Review

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Abstract

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: A LITERATURE REVIEW

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

HILLSBORO, OREGON

BY

AMANDA J. GROVERT

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

JULY 25, 2008

APPROVED: _____

Daniel McKittrick, PhD

Dedication

Toni, it feels like more than a coincidence that I finished this thesis on your birthday.

Knowing you has made writing this more than research to me. Thank you to your family for allowing me to dedicate this to you to memorialize our friendship, and you. I wish I could do more.

In loving memory of Antoinette "Toni" Clark. July 14, 1985 – February 17, 2008.

ABSTRACT

This literature review of research in the past 30 years on domestic violence against women focuses on the cycle of violence within abusive relationships, why women so frequently stay in abusive relationships, and what is the most helpful in allowing them to leave. Following the review of the literature is a discussion section in which I examine the usefulness of qualitative research approaches in studying this topic, as well as areas which need further research, such as women in rural and immigrant populations, identifying resources and support in order to leave abusive relationships, and determining which community resources are most useful to women who are coping with domestic violence situations.

Introduction

Definition

Every year in America, between 1.5 and 3.6 million women are raped or physically assaulted by an intimate partner. With multiple assaults per individual, this adds up to approximately 4 to 6 million intimate partner physical and sexual assaults every year – and there are many more that go unreported (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; Matthews, 2004).

For the purposes of this paper, domestic violence is defined as rape, physical assault and stalking perpetuated by current and former dates, spouses and cohabitating partners (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). This definition can include both same- and opposite-sex couples, however for the purposes of this review I will focus only on opposite-sex couples, as domestic violence in same-sex couples has its own unique complexities and attributes worthy of further study (McCue, 2008). Other studies and reviews include a broader definition of domestic violence, one that encompasses psychological and emotional abuse as well. In this paper, I will focus mainly on physical violence, due to the fact that psychological and emotional abuse tend to be underreported and are studied less frequently than physical abuse (Koss et al., 1994; Matthews, 2004). However, nearly all physically abusive relationships include an element of emotional and psychological abuse (Weiss, 2000), therefore making it difficult to separate out the different components.

1. The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for transparency and accountability, particularly in the context of public administration or corporate governance. The text suggests that without reliable records, it becomes difficult to track progress, identify issues, and ensure that resources are being used effectively.

2. The second part of the document addresses the challenges associated with data collection and analysis. It notes that while modern technology offers powerful tools for gathering and processing information, the quality and consistency of the data can vary significantly. The author highlights the need for standardized procedures and protocols to ensure that the data collected is accurate and comparable across different departments or projects.

3. The third part of the document focuses on the role of communication in the success of any initiative. It argues that clear and consistent communication is vital for ensuring that all stakeholders are aligned with the organization's goals and objectives. The text suggests that regular updates and reports can help build trust and foster a sense of shared purpose among team members.

4. The fourth part of the document discusses the importance of flexibility and adaptability in the face of changing circumstances. It notes that while a solid plan is necessary, it is equally important to be able to adjust that plan as new information becomes available or as conditions change. The author suggests that organizations should encourage a culture of innovation and experimentation, where employees are empowered to propose and test new ideas.

5. The fifth part of the document concludes by emphasizing the need for continuous improvement and learning. It suggests that organizations should regularly evaluate their performance and seek feedback from both internal and external stakeholders. The text argues that this process of reflection and learning is essential for staying competitive and achieving long-term success.

Men are frequently victims of domestic violence – anywhere from 80,000 to 800,000 men report being physically or sexually assaulted by an intimate partner every year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000; US Census Bureau, 2007). However, for the purposes of this review, only data from domestic violence against women will be examined. While it is certainly a worthwhile and much needed endeavor to examine domestic violence as pertaining to men, it is beyond the scope of this paper to do so. There is much more research available on domestic violence perpetrated against women, although more is coming out on domestic violence against men (Turner, 2002; Tjaden and Thonnes, 2000). Abused men also have a different experience than abused women, in that they struggle less with being controlled and being isolated, but more with stigma and discrimination (Matthews, 2004; McCue, 2008). Due to these differences and for simplicity's sake, in this review I will refer to perpetrators of domestic violence as male and the victims as female, with the understanding that both sexes commit and experience domestic violence.

Rationale for Review

In 2001, domestic violence made up twenty percent of all nonfatal violence against adult women – around 600,000 crimes. In 2000, about 1200 women were killed by an intimate partner. This number made up about 33 percent of female murder victims (Matthews, 2004).

Among adult African-American women (aged 15-59), assault by an intimate partner is the leading cause of premature death (US Department of Justice, 1998). Among Native American and Alaska Native communities, 19% of female homicide victims were

killed by family members (Matthews, 2004). Among Asian Americans, there was a 300% increase between 1995 and 1999 in the number of individuals provided with services by the Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence (Matthews, 2004). In Latino culture, 34% of Latinas reported experiencing domestic violence in either their country of origin or in the United States. Clearly, domestic violence is prevalent across subcultures in the U.S. It is also important to note that domestic violence rates are five times higher among families below poverty levels, and also twice as likely to be committed by unemployed men than by men who are working full time (Matthews, 2004, US Department of Justice, 1998). However, without controlling for socio-economic status, domestic violence occurs equally in urban, suburban, and rural areas (McCue, 2008).

In terms of lost productivity, women who are currently involved in or have recently left a violent relationship are 33% less likely than those in nonviolent relationships to maintain stable employment (Wettersten, et.al., 2004). Estimated medical expenses from domestic violence range from \$3 to \$5 billion annually. This does not include the \$100 million lost by businesses from sick leave, lost wages, non-productivity and absenteeism due to domestic violence (Matthews, 2004).

Because of the widespread prevalence across cultures, subcultures, and socio-economic status, effect on the economy, and severity of the crimes, the intricacies of domestic violence and violent relationships must be better understood by mental health professionals in order to provide more helpful and relevant services, and improve access to those services, for those who seek them. Since around 1980, more and more people are becoming aware of domestic violence, more literature is being published, and some of the common myths are being dispelled (McCue, 2008; Matthews, 2004). The last decade in

particular has seen a surge of newfound awareness and programs for domestic violence. The implications of this research and the logical next steps must be integrated and discussed in order to provide the best possible treatments, services, assessments and preventions for victims of domestic violence.

Literature Review

Procedure and Outline

This literature review will cover book chapters, books, and articles primarily from 1979 to the present. There has been little research on domestic violence conducted prior to the mid-1980's, although occasionally an earlier article will be included to provide a historical perspective. The articles utilized were found on the PsycInfo, PsycBooks, LexisNexis, Criminal Justice Periodicals, and Contemporary Women's Issues databases using the keywords "domestic violence" "family violence" and "intimate partner violence." These terms are used interchangeably in the literature. Also used is the more outdated term of "wife beating." For the sake of simplicity, the term domestic violence will be used throughout this review. Furthermore, most domestic violence advocates prefer to use the term family violence in reference to situations in which children or elders are being abused instead of or in addition to romantic partners (Reppucci, Woolard & Fried, 1999). Additional statistics were obtained from *Statistical Abstracts of the United States: 2007* and the United States Department of Justice. Textbooks and book chapters were also used to provide definitions of key terms.

This literature review will be divided into three sub-sections. In the first sub-section I will discuss the cycle of violence that occurs within the relationship. Violent relationships tend to follow a cyclical pattern, containing “honeymoon,” tension building, and serious battering phases, then repeating (Matthews, 2004).

In the second sub-section I will discuss the tendency of many abused partners to stay in and return to the abusive relationship, and possible reasons why that might be. The most often cited reason is economic dependency (Matthews, 2004; Wettersten, et al, 2004; Repucci, Woolard & Fried, 1999; Rothman et al., 2007; Bornstein, 2006). Other reasons have been the presence of children, threats made upon leaving or upon broaching the subject of leaving, and a lack of resources to turn to, such as shelters, counseling, or legal services (Sullivan et al., 1994; Matthews, 2004; Weiss, 2000).

In the third sub-section I will discuss what motivates or allows abused partners to leave abusive relationships permanently, and what protective factors are available to help them remain independent. There are resources available such as shelters and non-profit organizations, as well as the legal system, social workers, religious or spiritual communities, and law enforcement. The efficacy and availability of these resources will also be discussed.

Following this literature review will be a discussion section in which the research will be integrated, highlighting themes and major issues, and directions for clinical application and for future research will be presented.

Cycle of Violence

Abusive relationships tend to follow a cyclical pattern (Matthews, 2004, Walker, 1979, Weiss, 2000). The changes between the various stages presented are subtle, and vary depending on the relationship and the nature of the abuse.

In the beginning phase of the abusive relationship, some type of abuse occurs. This can be physical, sexual, or emotional, however, most often it is subtle and in the form of verbal insults or accusations (Walker, 1979; Weiss, 2000). Sometimes, though, the initial incident is physical. After the first episode of physical abuse, an abuser may not have to beat his partner to gain or maintain control. The threat of violence may be enough, because his partner knows he is capable of following through on his threats (Salber and Taliaferro, 1995).

Following this initial incident there is a tension building phase (Walker, 1979; Matthews, 2004). The abuse continues in this phase, and while it might be physical, it continues to be more subtle. Weiss (2000) describes a woman who was boiling a pot of soup when her husband walked by and knocked her forward with his elbow, causing her to fall forward, burning her hand severely in the boiling liquid. Later on, he denied being in the kitchen at all. In this second phase, the abused partner may feel the need to keep the abuser calm, and she may feel as if she is constantly “walking on eggshells” (Weiss, 2000, Walker, 1979). She may also feel that she is at fault for the abuse, and begin to believe that if she were only a “better partner” the abuse would stop. For example, the abused woman may start to imagine if she dressed differently, was a better cook, or was

more agreeable her partner would treat her better (Weiss, 2000; Salber and Taliaferro, 1995; McCue, 2008).

Building an abusive relationship takes time – if the abuse started occurring on the first date, far fewer women would stay in the relationships as long as they do. Survivors of domestic violence describe a “brainwashing” that occurs, which is difficult to quantify in empirical studies. Weiss (2000) describes interviews with women in which they say the tension-building phase happened so gradually they almost did not realize it. They describe abusers who picked at their self-worth by making off-hand comments about their food intake, or their merit as a wife or a girlfriend, most being careful to temper these remarks by saying they were only looking out for their partner’s well-being. Eventually the women begin to believe that their partners must be right in their critiques – after all, he was only looking out for their best interests (Weiss, 2000).

The next stage is referred to as the explosion, and after the slow progression of the tension building stage it may not come as a shock (Turner, 2002; Matthews, 2004). In this stage; the abuse reaches a crescendo. Weiss (2000) reports stories from women whose partners have attempted to push them from moving cars, brutally raped them, broken their noses, deliberately twisted their legs after painful knee surgery, or otherwise hurt them severely. One woman noted that, as severe as the beatings were, her partner always made sure to leave bruises on her arms, legs, and torso rather than her face, so that the marks could be hidden by clothing.

In the making-up stage, the abuser may apologize for the abuse. He may promise that it will never happen again, or blame the abused partner for forcing him to hurt her (Walker, 1979). Other common themes in this stage are the abuser claiming his victim is

exaggerating the abuse, or even claiming that it never happened, as in the case of the man who pushed his wife toward the boiling soup.

Often in this stage, the abusers apologize profusely and swear that they will change (Weiss, 2000; Walker, 1979). The abused partner, whether or not she believes this claim, may be so relieved that the abuse has stopped for the time being that she accepts him saying he will change and stay with him. More possible reasons why abused women stay in violent relationships will be discussed in the next section.

Finally comes the calm, or honeymoon stage (Matthews, 2004; Weiss, 2000; Walker, 1979). In this stage, the abused partner may begin to hope that her partner really meant it when he said it would never happen again. The abuser may give gifts to his partner, and treat her kindly for a period ranging anywhere from a few days to several months (Matthews, 2004; Weiss, 2000). Inevitably, the situation will again decline into tension building, explosion, and so on.

The specifics of these stages are as unique as the women that live them. As such, there are few academic studies examining what specifically these stages look like. The details come from the voices of the women who have lived these stories, and survived them.

Some women report their relationships being wonderful until they got married, at which point the tension began building, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly (Weiss, 2000). In the early stages of the relationship, many women report this tension building stage as their partner's efforts to gain control over their lives (Matthews, 2004; Bornstein, 2006). The abusers will attempt to isolate their partners from their family, friends, and careers (Sullivan et al., 2004; Bowker, 1983). One woman reported that her husband did

not tell her parents when she gave birth to their first grandchild, although he told his wife he had and that they did not care enough to visit. He continued to create situations like this throughout their marriage, effectively separating her from her family. Another woman reported that her husband told her landlord and a social worker who lived nearby that his wife was addicted to alcohol and painkillers, which meant they did not think as much of it when they heard yelling coming from the apartment (Weiss, 2000).

In the early stages of an abusive relationship, the escalating tension can be implied rather than overt violence. The abusive partner may hit, kick, or break furniture or other inanimate objects, while the abused partner watches. Displays of violence such as this are prophetic – the woman watching knows that even though the violence is directed at a piece of furniture this time, it may be her next time (Salber & Taliaferro, 1995; Matthews, 2004; Tjaden & Thoennes, 2001). The abuser may also threaten or harm the family pets as well (Weiss, 2000).

In some relationships, the tension building stage does not appear to be present at all. Weiss (2000) describes a woman whose husband would physically abuse her seemingly out of the blue. In the course of his apologies, he would also twist the incident around until she believed it was somehow her fault, subtly conveying that she had pushed his buttons until he had no choice but to explode. This woman described her situation as follows:

The first time there is violence, Andrea reflects, we don't believe it. Next, we explain it away. Then we do whatever we can to cope. With no prior experience of abuse, no way to make sense of what was happening to her, Andrea coped by putting herself into a state of suspended animation. She still went to work at the hospital every day. She still wrote prescriptions and made careful notes in medical charts.... But she felt nothing. She deliberately made herself numb. (p. 139)

It is not uncommon for women, after leaving a violent relationship, to wonder how they had believed they were somehow at fault for the abuse they endured. It is important to note, however, that even if this tension building stage does not appear to be present, it almost always is. It may come, as mentioned previously, in the form of comments about appearance, cooking, temperament, or others, in the guise of “just trying to help.” The quotation above is an example of how one abused woman who was made to believe the violence was her fault explained what was happening to her (Weiss, 2000).

In other situations, the tension building stage is more overt, but still subtle. It may not involve the sort of physical violence mentioned earlier, directed at the woman, pets, or inanimate objects (Weiss, 2000; McCue, 2008). Instead it can be more verbal, emotional, or covert. For example, the abuser may accuse his partner of having an affair, which can serve as a means to later “punish” her (Matthews, 2004; Weiss, 2000).

Violent relationships can be broken down in this cyclical nature, but as the interviews from Weiss (2000) illustrate, no violent relationship is the same as any other, despite surface similarities. Each woman’s relationship is unique, as are the reasons they stay in them or return to them.

The reference by Weiss (2000), used frequently in this review, is one of the only references found that allows survivors of domestic violence to be heard in their own words. As I stated above, it can be difficult to quantify the details of what happens in violent relationships, particularly in the stages leading up to the actual physical violence, which is why books like Weiss’ are so important. Weiss interviewed women who had experienced domestic violence and had escaped the relationship. After each interview she

provided her own thoughts on what had been said in light of her own experiences as a survivor of domestic violence and in terms of the research she had done, consolidating the interviews into themes, while allowing each woman a forum to tell her story. This source is largely a discussion of anecdotal examples, but essential for getting the feeling of what goes on in the minds of abused women, something that will be discussed further later in this review.

Reasons to Stay

The review of the research yielded a myriad of reasons why abused women stay in abusive relationships, or return to them. The most pressing of these reasons was safety. A woman who has been abused may fear retaliation from her abuser if she leaves the abusive environment or makes efforts to improve her situation (Turner, 2002). The abuser in the situation may have made specific threats, stating that if the abused partner leaves, he will hurt or kill her, her children, or himself (Matthews, 2004). Statistically, the most dangerous time for a woman in an abusive relationship is just prior to leaving that relationship (Turner, 2002; Salber & Taliaferro, 1995). In fact, women who are divorced or separated are 14 times more likely to report being the victim of violence by a spouse or ex-spouse. Separated and divorced women make up 10 percent of American women, yet they report 75 percent of intimate partner violence (US Department of Justice, 1998; McCue, 2008). It is possible that women who are separated or divorced are more likely to report violence from their partner, when in fact it could have occurred while they were married as well. Regardless, these statistics speak to the danger that comes with leaving a

violent relationship, and why some women may choose to stay and survive day to day rather than make an escape (McCue, 2008).

Women who have limited support from friends, family, or their communities may find it more difficult to leave abusive relationships (Sullivan et.al, 1994). Women who have received help and support from family and friends report it as being very important in allowing them to leave their abusers (Bowker, 1983). Support can come in both tangible and intangible forms. Close friends and family can provide emotional support in stressful times, which can help reduce the risk of falling ill due to great amounts of stress (Sullivan, et al., 1994). These friends and family members can also provide safe places for women and children to stay, store belongings, and be available to assist abused women in rebuilding their lives after leaving an abuser (Bowker, 1983). Women who do not have that support face even greater obstacles than those who do.

Social isolation has been shown to be associated with domestic violence. Severely abused women tend to be extremely socially isolated, and have no one in their limited social network who can provide the types of support listed above (Levendosky, Bogat, Theran, Trotter, von Eye, & Davidson, 2004). Additionally, women who are educated are less likely than those who are not to return to an abusive partner. It was hypothesized that higher education can contribute to the presence of social networks (Schutte, Malouff, & Doyle, 1988).

In abusive relationships, the abuser will often slowly work to isolate the abused partner socially by not allowing her to work, not allowing her to have a car, or not allowing her to leave the home (Matthews, 2004). Abusers may also prevent their partners from maintaining relationships with friends and family, via phone, letters,

Internet or community activities, such as church services, as a way of maintaining control (Turner, 2002, Levendosky, et al., 2004). This may explain part of the correlation between lack of social support and severe abuse. This also limits the woman's access to all resources, both practical and social, which makes her less likely to eventually leave the abusive partner.

Among communities made up of primarily of immigrants, the component of social isolation is intensified. In many situations a woman's greatest barrier to getting help is the inability to speak or understand English (McCue, 2008; Matthews, 2004). Female immigrants tend to have a poorer command of English than do their husbands or children, since children can learn English in school, and the men may need to have a rudimentary command of the language in order to get a job (McCue, 2008). This language barrier can mean that an abused immigrant woman does not know her legal options or rights, and can also mean that if she does manage to call someone for help, there is a chance that no one will be able to understand her.

The social isolation component can also be intensified for women living in rural areas. There is a belief that domestic violence occurs more often in urban areas than rural, and the reason for this is that violence among rural women is vastly underreported. There are fewer resources, such as shelters and social service programs, available. Access to everyday resources can be limited too: there may be fewer job opportunities, quality child care, housing opportunities and health care, and access to what resources are available can be confounded by distance or poor roads. Responses to domestic violence by law enforcement and medical services can be slow or inadequate (McCue, 2008). Most women experiencing domestic violence deal with isolation across all areas, but for

women in rural areas being isolated geographically makes it even worse. They may not have neighbors for miles, which means there is no chance of a neighbor or passerby suspecting trouble and calling for help. It may be more difficult for a rural abused woman to reach safety, be that a shelter or the home of a friend or family member. McCue (2008) specifically mentions Native American women as potentially lacking phone service or access to any sort of transportation. For example, in many areas of the Navajo Nation, located in the Four Corners region of the United States, there is no cell phone service. A woman isolated by domestic violence, then, can be further isolated by geography, lack of resources, and lack of communication with people outside her household (McCue, 2008).

Shame or guilt about abuse may represent another reason abused women do not have adequate social support, and thus may indirectly influence their inability to leave their abusers (Levendosky, et al., 2004). This shame may come from a lack of public awareness about the causes and effects of domestic violence (Matthews, 2004, Turner, 2002, Sullivan, 1994). For example, around half of abused women seek help from their religious leader (Gordon, 1996). However, members of the clergy may also know the abuser in the relationship, and may be sympathetic to him. Additionally, clergy may be committed to maintaining a marriage, even an abusive one, and advise the women against leaving their abusive partners. About 15% of women who confided in their religious leader reported it to be helpful (Gordon, 1996).

Some women are raised to believe that their husbands or male partners are in charge, and so are hesitant to report abuse (Weiss, 2000; Matthews, 2004). A woman's abuser may also be her main source of affection when he is not being abusive, which is particularly dangerous when she is socially isolated (Salber & Taliaferro, 1995). Many

women interviewed in Weiss (2000) mentioned growing up in a household where divorce was not only frowned upon, it was absolutely not an option. These particular women tended to be the ones who mentioned the belief that they were the ones at fault for their partners' abuse, believing that if they were better wives to them, the abuse would stop. Immigrant women face unique challenges in this realm as well. They may experience extreme pressure to remain silent for fear of the family "losing face" in the community. Reporting domestic violence has the potential to cut the abused woman off from her community completely (McCue, 2008).

Abusive partners may also use a woman's children to coerce her into staying in the relationship. The abusive partner may threaten to harm the children, take them away, or physically hurt the children in front of their mother in order to maintain control of the her (Salber & Taliaferro, 1995).

A 1992 study reported that half of the participants in their sample of abused women were dissatisfied with the police response to their assailants (Sullivan, Basta, Tan, & Davidson, 1992). The criminal justice system (defined as law enforcement officers, lawyers, and judges) is used more often by abused women than any other community service (Gordon, 1996). However, police officers were as frequently unhelpful as they were helpful (Sullivan, et al., 1992; Hamilton & Coates, 1993). Police reportedly would frequently question the abused partner's story, criticize her for staying in the relationship, or fail to inform her of other agencies that may help her (Hamilton & Coates, 1993). It has also been reported that police presence has caused violence to increase (Sullivan et al., 1992; Gordon, 1996).

Economic reasons were the most often reported for why women stay in abusive relationships. If a woman is cut off socially and not allowed to work, her partner may be her only means of financial support (Matthews, 2004; Salber & Taliaferro, 1995). Rural women were mentioned above as facing unique challenges in accessing resources and leaving their abusers. In terms of economic reasons for staying in abusive relationships, rural farm families are often one-income families, most or all of their income coming from the farm. A woman whose family finances are tied up in land and equipment may face the choice of staying in an abusive relationship or leaving with no means of income – or leaving her partner with no means of income, since she may be a key part of the farming business. She may also have strong emotional ties to the farm animals and land, and fear that the animals may be neglected or harmed in some way if she leaves them (McCue, 2008; Salber & Taliaferro, 1995). Additionally, restraining orders against abusers are less viable for women living on rural farms because the abusive partners cannot be kept away from the family farm if it is their only source of income (McCue, 2008):

A 1981 study found that when an abused woman leaves her abuser, there is a 50% chance her standard of living will drop below the poverty line. The women who were most likely to return to the abusive relationship were those who had been married the longest or had fewer skills or less work experience than those who were less likely to return home (Martin, 1981).

Bornstein (2006) describes economic dependency as “the degree to which one person relies on another for financial support, and is used to describe situations in which one member of a dyad has exclusive...control over financial resources” (p. 598).

Economic dependency can occur if one person is the sole provider in the family and denies his partner access to resources, but also when one person uses threat or intimidation to take control of finances. Women receiving welfare or in low-income occupations are significantly less likely than other women to terminate abusive relationships (Woffordt et al., 1994). Economic dependency can also be influenced by the presence of children, availability of alternate housing, and access to financial resources beyond job income (Bornstein, 2006). Additionally, anywhere from 37% to 96% of women in abusive relationships have reported being impacted at work as a result of the abuse (Wettersten et al., 2004). They have a hard time keeping a job or getting promotions, may miss work due to abuse related hospital visits, or may not be allowed to work by their abusers.

Bornstein (2006) points out that it is important to realize that links between economic dependency and abuse are bi-directional. High economic dependency may lead some women to tolerate physical abuse, but repeated abuse may lead to economic dependence. Women in violent relationships who do work may have trouble concentrating, be harassed at work by an abusive partner, and have low self-efficacy due to abuse. The abuse can affect work performance to the point where they may lose their jobs, contributing to their economic dependency on their partners (Wettersten et al., 2004).

One final, somewhat controversial, reason women may stay in violent relationships is the theory of learned helplessness. This theory is controversial because some researchers feel it takes a stance of “blaming the victim,” (Walker, 1989, McCue, 2008), and implying she should be able to somehow control what is happening to her.

Walker points out, though, that learned helplessness is not passivity, but rather a sophisticated set of coping skills (Walker, 1989; McCue, 2008). Abused women may use defense mechanisms to cope with what is happening in their relationships, such as minimizing, dissociation, and denial (Walker, 1989).

Every woman who stays in a violent relationship will have her own reasons to do so. Her abuser could have made threats to her or her children, she could be facing poverty if she left, she may have been out of the workforce for years and lack skills and experience necessary to obtain employment, she may be a rural woman with few resources, or a recent immigrant dealing with a language barrier. She may have reached out to police or clergy in the past and found them to not be helpful. She may be focused on surviving day to day instead of focusing on escape. She may feel ashamed of what she has endured, or guilty for leaving her partner. Whatever the specific reasons, there is no universal answer for why women stay in abusive relationships, it may well be for multiple reasons, and it is much more complicated than “just leaving.”

Motivations to Leave, Protective Factors and Community Resources

The specific reasons individual women give for why they eventually leave their abusive partners are as diverse and numerous as the women who give them. Every one of them can be summed up in one quotation: “There was no other choice.”

Since the early 1990’s, research on preventive interventions for domestic violence has increased (Repucci, et al., 1999). As has been demonstrated thus far in this review,

domestic violence is extremely complex, and no single strategy or intervention is going to eradicate it.

Some of the more effective strategies are interventions for children who have witnessed abuse. Although this review has focused on female, adult victims of domestic violence, children experience this violence as well, through actually witnessing the abuse, hearing but not seeing it, being injured in the “cross-fire” of violence, and being manipulated by the abuser (Faller, 2003). Around half of children who are exposed in some way to domestic violence display emotional and behavioral problems, such as cognitive deficits, post-traumatic stress disorder, and depression (Kot & Tyndall-Lind, 2005; Faller, 2003). In addition to these, children who have witnessed domestic violence are more likely to either be the victim or perpetrator of violence in adult relationships (Faller, 2003; Osofsky, 2003). There are certain protective factors that help lower these risks, such as a stable relationship with an adult. This can be a complicated process for children exposed to violent relationships between one or both of their parents, but children may have opportunities to receive support from relatives, friends, or even a sensitive police officer (Osofsky, 2003). Further education of mental health professionals, educators, law enforcement officers, and others who may come into contact with children affected by domestic violence will be helpful in recognizing and stopping the ripple effect that so often occurs, and providing support to children when they need it the most (Faller, 2003; Osofsky, 2003). Kot and Tyndall-Lind (2005) outline an empirically supported play therapy for child witnesses of domestic violence that emphasizes a corrective therapeutic relationship based on trust, safety and mutual respect. There is at this point little research on preventative measures outside of childhood.

At that point, then, it is necessary for reactive resources, which are the resources most commonly used in response to abuse. The resources abused women most often turn to are the legal system, mental health professionals, support groups, and shelters.

In 1994, Sullivan recruited women in domestic violence shelters, and randomly assigned half of the 141 participants to receive the free services of an advocate for the first 10 weeks following their shelter stay. Sullivan's study was the first to examine the effects of providing women access to an advocate – prior to this study, most research on domestic violence had focused on prevalence and factors keeping women in abusive relationships.

As I explained earlier in this review, many abused women lack community resources that would make escaping abusive relationships possible, such as affordable housing, employment, child care, legal assistance, and social support. The purpose of the advocate is to assist victims with accessing these resources. Advocates are a part of most domestic violence shelter staffs. Sullivan found that a 6-months post-shelter stay, two thirds of the women were no longer involved with their abusive partners, and there were no differences between the experimental and control groups on this factor. Women who had worked with advocates reported greater effectiveness in obtaining desired resources, increased social support, and higher quality of life compared to women in the control group, although both groups tended to regress toward the mean by the 6 month follow up, displaying fewer differences than at the 10-week follow up.

Sullivan had a good retention rate for his study – 95% of his original sample was interviewed at 10 weeks post-intervention, and 93% were interviewed at the 6-month follow up. Sullivan's study also showed a wide range of diversity within the sample. Of

the participants, 45% were Caucasian, 43% were African-American, 8% were Latina, and 1% were Asian American. At least 78% had one child living with them. At least 60% lived below the federal poverty line, 82% were unemployed, and 81% were receiving some type of government assistance.

Sullivan's sample is representative of many of the women who stay in shelters (Gordon, 1996; Levendosky et al., 2004). They tend to be unemployed, many rely on their partners for financial support, many live below the poverty line. Women who stay at least one night in a domestic violence shelter, on average, seek help six times from other community resources, such as the police, mental health professionals, or the clergy, before entering the shelter (Gordon, 1996). These women who come to the shelter after several unsuccessful attempts to get help elsewhere are likely the ones who are socially isolated, who do not have easy access to family, friends, or co-workers, or who may have a language barrier preventing them from seeking help. For example, women who are employed outside the home are more likely to contact the police or other social services than women who do not (Gordon, 1996; McCue, 2008; Turner, 2002).

At the beginning of this section I said women who were able to permanently leave their abusive partners did so because there was no other choice. Weiss (2000), a domestic violence survivor herself, interviewed women who had been victims of domestic violence who were able to escape. Her book allowed women to explain their experiences in their own words, giving voice to the women behind the statistics.

Many times, Weiss said, the actual thing that pushes a woman to leave her abusive partner is a last straw, that may seem minor. One woman, while out with her husband, reported that a passerby heard an exchange between the couple and called the

abusive partner a rude name. The woman left her husband later that week. Some do not leave so quickly. They spend months or years planning their escape until that last straw, the one that leads them to say they have no other choice.

Many women report that it was when they became pregnant that they found the courage to leave. They realized that their partners were not just hurting them anymore, they were hurting a child too. Some women leave once their baby is born, when the child becomes a player in the abuse. One woman reported leaving after her partner calmly threatened their baby daughter with a shotgun.

Another woman decided to leave her husband during a Passover Seder, when her family was recounting their people's escape from slavery. Making the connection to her own situation, she resolved that night she would no longer be controlled by anyone. Yet another resolved to leave after waking up from a coma that her partner had put her in.

Abuse, Weiss states, is not about anger, but about power and control. This is why statistically, the most danger to an abused woman comes in the 6 months after leaving her abuser, because by doing so she sends a clear message saying he no longer controls her (Weiss, 2000; McCue, 2008; Turner, 2002).

Discussion

In this discussion section I will integrate the information presented in the literature review into coherent main points. As I have discussed above, no two women experience the same pattern of domestic violence, meaning that research using qualitative interviews is imperative to truly understanding the nature of violent relationships.

Second, much of the research in domestic violence has examined women who live in urban areas, who are employed. However, domestic violence occurs equally among urban and rural women, many of whom are not employed outside the home (McCue, 2008). Therefore it is important to begin researching domestic violence in these rural populations in order to provide necessary services. Women who have recently immigrated are another group that has been neglected in the research. Third, preliminary researchers have begun to look at the types of resources that are useful in helping women leave abusive relationships (Sullivan et al., 1992). The time has come to expand upon this research so that the legal system, mental health professionals, medical professionals, and advocacy services are prepared to offer assistance and support to allow woman to leave abusive relationships. Finally I will discuss the importance of examining which of these community resources are most effective and why.

Resarch Using Qualitative Interviews

Only one book dealing exclusively with qualitative interviews (Weiss, 2000) was found in the course of the literature review. Facts, figures, percentages, and ratios are important in understanding the scope of the problem. Scholarly articles are essential in examining the broader patterns of domestic violence, such as the general cycle of relationships, resources that the majority of women find helpful, and so on. In order to have the greatest chance of understanding what a woman in a violent relationship is going through, though, the voices of those women must be heard. For example, Weiss presents information from her interviews about the tension building phase of a relationship. This

information is difficult to quantify, as the tension building phase can be anything from calculated put-downs to explicit verbal threats, damaging furniture to social isolation. Many of the women interviewed in Weiss' book described a "brainwashing" that occurs in the initial phases of a violent relationship, which is also difficult to describe in numbers. These individual stories are the details that are lost in quantitative research, especially in a topic with as many nuances as domestic violence.

It is easy to become desensitized to numbers so big they seem unreal, such as the 4 to 6 million assaults by intimate partners every year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). It is not so easy to ignore the compelling voices of the women themselves, and know that for every one who escaped and is able to tell her story, countless others are not. One third of female murder victims are killed by an intimate partner (Matthews, 2004). This amounts to around 1200 women every year (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000).

There were a few articles like the one by Rothman, Hathaway, Stidsen and de Vries (2007), which dealt in structured qualitative interviews. The focus in these articles was on women's employment and dependency. This research allows for some of the detail provided in Weiss' (2000) book, but also draws more decisive conclusions than Weiss is able to, which is a positive step. Rothman and colleagues studied how employment helps victims of domestic violence. The study was qualitative, and conducted among employees at an urban hospital over a period of several months. The sample size was small, 21 women who had recently been physically abused by their current or most recent partner, but yielded some interesting results. Rothman et al. found that employment helped victims of domestic violence by improving their finances, promoting physical safety, increasing self-esteem, improving social connectedness,

providing mental respite, and providing motivation. These results are fairly typical of what one would expect from reviewing the literature. Social isolation is often a huge component of what causes women to stay so long in violent relationships (Sullivan et al., 1994; Bowker, 1983; Levendosky et al., 2004). Working would relieve that isolation, and also provide a safe place, particularly in a large workplace setting like the hospital from which Rothman et al. drew their sample. Most of the women in the Rothman et al. sample also had at least some higher education, which has been shown to make women less likely to return to an abusive partner (Schutte, Malouff & Doyle, 1988). The benefits of employment for victims of domestic violence are almost common sense, although studies like that of Rothman et al. and others are helpful in concretely showing the link.

The Rothman et al. (2007) article is one of many that examine the way employment helps victims of domestic violence. Bornstein (2006) did a literature review examining the relationship between dependency and domestic violence. Bornstein's review is useful in that it takes a relatively small area of the complex issue of domestic violence, that of dependency, and looks in depth at different facets of it. Bornstein uses studies with three general assessment strategies: self-report scales, structured interviews, and classification via category membership, such as enrollment in a treatment program for abusers or use of emergency medical services. These three assessment strategies are primarily what are used throughout the literature on domestic violence, with the exception of the occasional unstructured interview, like Weiss' (2000) interviews. Bornstein concluded that women's economic dependency is a significant risk factor in potential abuse, and that emotional dependency, while a risk factor, is less significant.

Bornstein found that Depressive Personality Disorder symptoms play a role in abused women's emotional dependency, but not in abusive men.

Wettersten and colleagues (2004) looked at the impact of employment on women currently residing in a domestic violence shelter. Like Rothman et al. (2007), Wettersten et al. used a structured qualitative interview. Wettersten et al. found similar benefits as Rothman et al. to being employed, but also noted the impact of violent relationships on women's work performance, discussing how frequent domestic violence related absences led to lost work opportunities and how the women interviewed tended to have difficulty concentrating. As I said about the Rothman et al. study, it is beneficial to have statistically significant results like this, but the results again are somewhat common sense. It makes sense that a women living in a violent household would have trouble concentrating on her work, or that she would frequently miss work. The qualitative research done in this domain of women's employment and dependency by Wettersten et al., Rothman et al., Bornstein (2006) and others is certainly important groundwork. The time has now come to examine different domains of domestic violence, which may be harder to look at as conclusively.

Rural Women and Recent Immigrants

One author, and only one author, reviewed in this research talked at length regarding the unique challenges faced by women attempting to leave violent relationships who are recent immigrants or who live in a rural setting, although others mentioned this topic briefly or cited statistics. The research in this book (McCue, 2008) is presented in

this review. A closer look, however, at rural and immigrant populations is certainly needed before any broader conclusions can be drawn regarding these women. For example, much research has focused on links between employment and domestic violence. McCue points out that women in rural farming communities will most often work on the family farm, meaning that although they may get the sense of purpose or mental respite gained by women employed outside the home (Rothman et al., 2007), they will not have the additional benefits of increased social support, increased safety, and financial gain, since any earnings would be put back into the family farm.

Many perpetrators of domestic violence, as a means of control, will not allow their partners to work outside the home at all (Matthews, 2004; Turner, 2002; Levendosky et al., 2004). If this is the case, and it frequently is, it will not matter how many benefits there are to employment. Add to this the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, and the social isolation that comes from geography alone, and it seems clear that women in rural areas have unique challenges that deserve further study in order to begin to provide more effective treatments. These population are harder to study, though, which is likely a reason why research has been conducted so much on employed women in urban settings – it is far simpler to find participants at a large hospital of 16,000 employees, as Rothman et al. (2007) did than it is in a small farming community of 5,000, where domestic violence is underreported anyway (McCue, 2008).

The lack of research concerning domestic violence in immigrant populations is a similar concern, and one that is also difficult to research. In many recent immigrant populations, adult women have a poorer command of English than their husbands or children (McCue, 2008). They may also face more shame or guilt in talking about abuse

to someone outside their culture, and may not understand their legal rights (McCue, 2008). However, recent immigrant women face challenges like those of rural women, and are equally, if not more, overlooked. Rural and immigrant women are in need of services to help escape domestic violence, as much as urban, English-speaking women, but with the lack of research concerning their experiences and distinct needs, those services are difficult to develop and make effective.

Resources for Abused Women

Few questions are asked more often of abused women than, “why didn’t you just leave?” (Weiss, 2000). There is a great deal of research to answer this question, as I have discussed previously. There is a lack, however, of research surrounding how abused partners find the resources and support to actually leave. Most of the research on prevention in this area focuses around interventions with children, which are certainly a worthwhile area of study, considering the ties between witnessing violence as children and perpetrating or experiencing it as adults. There is almost no research on preventative interventions for adults. Researchers have demonstrated some success using rape education programs, showing post-intervention changes in rape (Repucci et al., 1999). The same sort of changes may be possible for domestic violence. This is a worthwhile direction for future research. Many colleges already educate incoming students on rape myths and safe behavior (Repucci et al., 1999). Education surrounding domestic violence could be incorporated into that as well.

Sullivan (1994), as stated earlier, was the first to examine the effects of providing women access to an advocate after staying at a shelter. While it's true that the staff at most shelters provide advocacy services during the shelter stay, few researchers since 1994 have examined the efficacy of services either during or after shelter stay. Also, although Sullivan's sample was representative of women who stay in shelters (Gordon, 1996; Levendosky et al., 2004), he did not examine, at least overtly, immigrant populations and non-English speaking populations. It can be hypothesized that recent immigrants, even working with an advocate, may not experience the same gains as the other women in the study due to language and cultural barriers (McCue, 2008).

There is also little research on other community resources and responses to domestic violence. Sullivan, after examining various social and community supports for domestic violence survivors, concluded that advocacy services, shelter services, or police interventions on their own will not significantly reduce the amount of domestic violence a woman may experience. In fact, women already rate police interventions as particularly ineffective in comparison with the other resources mentioned (Gordon, 1996). Instead, all of these services must be part of a larger package designed to work with abused women (Sullivan, 1994).

As I stated above, there is a great deal of qualitative research concerning issues like the links between employment and domestic violence (Rothman, et al., 1997; Bornstein, 2006; Levendosky, et al., 2004; Wettersten, et al., 2004). There are books like Weiss' (2000) collection of interviews, which are invaluable. Research like Sullivan's 1994 study on advocacy intervention is a step in the right direction in terms of providing more detailed insight to help prevent and treat domestic violence. Gordon (1996)

conducted a meta-analysis of 12 studies examining perceived usefulness of services most frequently utilized by abused women. The studies making up the meta-analysis consisted mostly questionnaires and structured interviews, allowing for a certain level of detail in responses. Gordon's findings, that some of the most utilized resources, like the criminal justice system or the clergy, were some of the lowest rated by abused women, are startling. Gordon also points out that women in the 12 studies were ones who were not under such strict control that they do not have the opportunity to respond to surveys, which lends support to the point that there is an important population of women out there that is not being heard.

Need for Research on Resource Effectiveness

The next step, then, in the domestic violence research is an obvious one. More research should be done on which community resources are effective or not, and why. Salber and Taliaferro (1995) provide a reference guide for physicians on how to recognize signs of domestic violence and what to do about it. This reference is useful, first of all, in that it shows that the medical community is working to dispel myths surrounding domestic violence, such as misconceptions about who it happens to and why a woman who has been abused may not readily admit it to a physician. The Salber and Taliaferro article is also useful for educating providers about broad concepts, and in fact cites many of the same articles I have used here. Yet women seek help from community providers an average of six times before coming to a shelter (Gordon, 1996). Why are these resources not helping? Providers' lack of education in the intricacies of domestic

violence is an obvious answer, but examination cannot stop there. Women surveyed reported that physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and in particular, social workers, are helpful for all types of abuse (Gordon, 1996). This is a start, but it is not enough yet. What will help people in the legal system, the education system, the mental health field, gain the expertise needed to help women escape violent relationships without having to seek services six times before going to a shelter? Finally, what can shelters do to further assist the women that stay there? These are the questions facing the next group of researchers, who have information about prevalence and what happens in violent relationships, but not what helps end them. It is this research yet to come that will provide the treatments, services, assessments, and methods of prevention for the societal problem of domestic violence.

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